

CAN ANY ONE COME TO YOUR CHURCH?

By Donna R. Jensen

Fellowship at our church in Los Angeles was very warm. Wayne and I joined a Bible study group on Friday evenings called Discipline and Discovery. A couple of weeks into the study, a change in my husband's hours at work, made it impossible for him to get to the meetings, but I continued to go.

The object of the eight-week course was to better prepare us for service. As the seventh meeting was coming to its conclusion, a man walked in. Looking him over, I became excited. Surely the Lord had sent him to us to use what we'd been learning. Quickly, I discovered that I was the only one who felt that way.

One woman leaned over to another and said, "Just look at him! They ought to lock the door at night. You never know who might wander in here!" That was pretty much the consensus of opinion.

A physical pain came up inside me and seemed to stick in my throat. I hadn't made any move toward the man because I felt it was our leader's place to talk to him. When Pastor Delgado told the man there was nothing we could do for him, I rose from my seat and started forward.

Knowing the work that Wayne and I did with derelicts in Skid Row, Pastor called to me as I approached, "There isn't anything we can do is there Donna?"

There was so much I wanted to say, but the ache in my throat permitted only a few words, "I think perhaps there is something I can do."

The man was a Mexican, he stuttered slightly, he had liquor on his breath, and he was carrying his shoes because of blisters on the tops of his feet from wearing shoes without socks. He had left a bar to come to church and I was ashamed of the treatment he'd received from this group. Why would he ever go to church again?

"Can you walk?" I asked.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Do you want to walk with me?"

"Yes, ma'am," he nodded.

I bundled up our eight-month-old baby girl to leave. Our minister had brought us the twelve blocks from our apartment to the meeting, but I decided to walk the distance now with this man.

Everyone was upset that I was leaving with this stranger. The minister's wife caught hold of Melissa's foot and tried to physically restrain us.

Again, the lump in my throat kept me from saying much. "It's all right. It's really alright."

At last we were on our way. As we left the group behind, the ache in my heart abated and Henry and I talked easily.

By the time we reached the turn off to our apartment I felt that I could invite him in.

About thirty minutes later, one of the couples from the meeting knocked on my door. They had come to make sure that Melissa and I were okay.

When they found Henry soaking his feet in a pan of hot water and eating a bowl of soup, they decided to join us for a bite to eat.

In the kitchen, Nathan said, "I really felt like a heel after you left. I've asked God to give me the courage to live the gospel."

Before they left, Nathan and Sally invited Henry to come to church on Sunday and offered him a ride.

Surprised, Henry asked innocently, "Can anyone come to your church?"

With red faces, they assured him that everyone was welcome.